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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 003155

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/12/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: RETURN OF THE HOCA

(U) Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter. Reason: 1.5
(b,d).

11. (C) Summary: At Saadet Party's May 11 national convention, long-time leader of Turkey's Islamist movement Necmettin Erbakan returned to active politics as party chairman. Unlike recent conventions of right-of-center DYP and ANAP, Saadet's congress was far more lively and colorful. The mood of the crowd and tone of official speeches were decidedly anti-AK Party, more specifically anti-P.M. Erdogan. End summary.

12. (C) Poloff attended Islamist Saadet Party's May 11 national congress, where long-time leader of Turkey's Islamist movement Necmettin Erbakan (known as 'Hoca' or teacher) officially returned to active political life after his five-year political ban was lifted in February. The 77-year old Erbakan was the only candidate for Saadet leader and received unanimous support from the party's 1153 delegates. Former Saadet leader Recai Kutan retained a high position in the party as a member of the party's General Administrative Council.

'Our army, Our Commander'

13. (C) In contrast to right-of-center DYP and ANAP conventions attended by poloff, the Saadet congress was orderly and spirited. Devotees packed the undersized arena more than an hour before the convention began, while several thousand others mingled outside chanting Islam-tinged slogans like 'mucahit Erbakan' (Islamic warrior Erbakan). Unlike the DYP and ANAP congresses, there were significant numbers families with young children in attendance. A large section of the arena was reserved for headscarved women activists, who were clearly the loudest group on hand. The slogans and chants continued after Erbakan arrived and was escorted to a red plush couch on stage: "here's our army, here's our commander"; "the legend has returned"; "welcome, my sultan"; and "Mehmet the Conqueror was your age when he conquered Istanbul."

Light Bulb Burned Out?

14. (C) The mood of the crowd was decidedly anti-AK Party, more specifically anti-P.M. Erdogan. Almost all of the numerous banners raised by the crowd attacked AK in some way: "My hoca has returned; the light bulb is burned out" (a phrase that rhymes in Turkish; AK's symbol is a light bulb); "My hoca, rescue us from these children"; and "Those who skipped class should have stayed in school." In addition, a Saadet official read aloud goodwill messages from political figures. The crowd booed Erdogan's welcome statement but cheered loudly messages from Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc (an Erdogan rival in AK); opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal; and far-left nationalist Worker's Party leader Dogu Perincek.

15. (C) Speeches by Erbakan and other senior party officials picked up on the theme, heavily criticizing AK for ineffective governance and for straying from the Islamist flock. Erbakan, in particular, accused AK members of deserting the path they had chosen for 30 years. He pointedly left out any mention of Fazilet Party in his remarks on the history of the Islamist movement in Turkey (note: Erdogan, Arinc, and others broke away from Fazilet after the party was closed in 2001 and formed AK. End note).

16. (C) Comment: There is a core of about 40 AK M.P.s who, as former provincial lieutenants in Erbakan's Milli Gorus (National View) movement, remain devoted to him and intent on disrupting Erdogan's control of the parliamentary group and legislative agenda. Concerned that Erbakan will woo many or all of them away from AK, Erdogan has indicated to his advisors he has limited room for bold political maneuver,

including foreign policy steps seen by Milli Gorus adherents
as too openly in line with U.S. interests, in the months
leading up to AK's first party congress. End comment.
PEARSON